

Friar Odoric, "The Friar Reacheth Cambalech, and Discourseth Thereof, and of the Great Caan's Palace There," in *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China, Volume 1*, ed. Henry Yule (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1866), 127-135.



37. The Friar reacheth Cambalech, and discourses thereof, and of
the Great Caan's Palace there.

And departing thence, I passed on through many a city and many a town towards the east, until I came to that noble city CAMBALECH, an old city of that famous province of CATHAY.¹ The Tartars took the city, and then built another at a distance of half-a-mile, which they called TAYDO.

¹ *Khan-bálig* (*Mong.*, “The Khan’s city”), the Cambalu of Marco, PEKING. The Chinese capital was still so called by the Turks in the time of P. Ricci, and may probably be called so to this day.

The city on this site was originally (*multum est vetus et antiqua*, as Odoric says) the capital of the kingdom of Yan. B.c. 222, this was conquered by the Thsin sovereigns of China, and the city lost its importance. A.D. 936, it was taken by the Tartar *Khitan*, and became their “Nan-king” or “Southern Capital”. In 1125, it fell to the Kin, ancestors of the Manchus, who gave it the name of *Si-king* or “Western Capital”. In 1153, it received from the fourth Kin sovereign the name of *Chung-tu* or “Central Court”. It seems also to have been known as *Yen-king* under this dynasty. It was captured by Chinghiz in 1215, and in 1264 Kublai made it his chief residence. In 1267 he built a new city, three *li* to the north-east of the old one, to which was given the name of *Ta-tu* or “Great Court”, called by the Mongols *Daïdu*, the Taydo of Odoric and Taidu of Polo, who gives a description of its dimensions, the number of its gates, etc., similar to that in the text. The Chinese accounts give only eleven gates.

This city was abandoned as a royal residence on the expulsion of the Mongol dynasty in 1368, but re-occupied in 1421 by the third Ming Emperor, who built the walls as they now exist, reducing their extent and the number of the gates to nine. This is what is commonly called the *Tartar city* of the present day (called also by the Chinese *Lau-chhing* or “Old Town”), which therefore represents the Taydo of Odoric. The ruins of the older Yen-king or Chungtu were still visible in the time of the Ming, but they were embraced in the new southern city called *Waichhing* or “Outer Town”, the wall of which was built in 1554.

The circumference of the present Tartar city appears from the plans to be about fifteen miles. Martini speaks of it as having still twelve gates in his time, but he was almost certainly wrong. It has three on the south side, and two on each of the others. The circuit of the two cities together is about twenty-two miles according to the scale on the plan given by Pauthier, though Timkowski states it at forty versts, or $26\frac{2}{3}$ miles. But Odoric’s dimensions may have been quite correct, for the Tartar city was larger, and there was a space of more than half-a-mile between the two. (Timkowski, i, 315, etc., etc.)

This latter city hath twelve gates, between every two of which there is a space of two long miles; and betwixt the two cities also there is a good amount of population, the compass of the two together being more than forty miles. Here the Great Khan¹ hath his residence, and hath a great palace, the walls of which are some four miles in compass. And within this space be many other fine palaces. [For within the great palace wall is a second enclosure, with a distance between them of perhaps half a bowshot, and in the midst between those two walls are kept his stores and all his slaves; whilst within the inner enclosure dwells the Great Khan with all his family, who are most numerous, so many sons and daughters, sons-in-law, and grandchildren hath he; with such a multitude of wives and councillors and secretaries and servants, that the whole palace of four miles' circuit is inhabited.]²

And within the enclosure of the great palace there hath been a hill thrown up on which another palace is built, the most beautiful in the whole world. And this whole hill is planted over with trees, wherefrom it hath the name of the *Green Mount*. And at the side of this hill hath been formed a lake [more than a mile round],² and a most beautiful bridge built across it. And on this lake there be such multitudes of wild-geese and ducks and swans,³ that it is something to

¹ I am not sure that a faithful version should not render *Magnus Canis* as the “Great Dog,” for in most copies the word is regularly declined, *Canis, Cani, Canem*, as if he were really a bow-wow. According to Ludolf, an old German translation of Mandeville does introduce the mighty prince as *Der Grosse Hund*. That author thinks that some such *double entendre* may have led to the story in Pliny about a people who have a dog for their king, a suggestion which would have been a happy one had the people in question dwelt in the heart of Asia instead of the heart of Africa. (*Ludolf, Supp. to Comm. in Hist. Æthiop.* p. 26.) The familiarity of North Italy with the *Can Grande* of Verona may have made Odoric and his contemporaries look less strangely on the denomination.

² MIN. RAM.

³ The word is in all the best MSS. *Cesani* or *Cesenæ*, for which Mus. substitutes a gloss “*avium aquaticarum*.” The word is not to be found in

wonder at; so that there is no need for that lord to go from home when he wisheth for sport. Also within the walls are thickets full of sundry sorts of wild animals; so that he can follow the chase when he chooses without ever quitting the domain.¹

Ducange, or, I believe, any Italian dictionary. It occurs also in some of the MSS. of Marco Polo describing the Khan's falconry as *Cesini*, where others have *Cycni*, and where Baldello Boni considers it a copyist's error for that word. I do not believe it to be so, for I find *Cecini* also coupled with *gruve* or cranes, in a list of poultry and game, etc., in the book of Giovanni da Uzzano on Merchandise. (*Della Decima*, iv, 63.) It is, therefore, almost certainly a word which should be recognised, though most likely it means swans, and so I have rendered it. Indeed the old French Polo just edited by Pauthier has *sesnes* (p. 310).

¹ In this account of the palace we have an instance of true particulars occurring only in the Minor Ramusian version, e.g. the double enceinte. This is mentioned by Polo, and is found in the existing palace, which appears to preserve many of the features of that of the Mongols, though the latter was burnt about thirty years after their fall. Indeed the arrangement of royal enclosures in all the Indo-Chinese countries, including Burma and Java, appears to follow the same traditional rules, probably derived originally from India. The palace at Amarapura, with its square form, its successive enclosures, its masonry basement eight or nine feet from the ground, its hall of gold and vermillion, etc., quite corresponded on a smaller scale with this description.

The existing Tartar city at Pekin officially termed *Nei-chhing* or "Inner-Town," encloses a second called *Hoang-chhing* or "Imperial (yellow?) Town," which, no doubt, represents the outer palace of Odoric's day, and that includes a third called *Fseu-kin-chhing*, or "Red City," which is the actual residence.

The Green Mount, to which Kublai, anticipating the experiments of zealous planters in our day, caused remarkable trees of every bulk to be transferred with the earth attaching to their roots, still stands conspicuous within the palace walls of Pekin. "Your eye rests with pleasure upon this round wood-covered hill, rising picturesquely from the middle of the glittering roofs and umbrageous trees within the palace walls." (Swinhoe, *North China Campaign*, p. 353.) It is called by the Chinese *King-Shan*, "Court Mountain," *Wan-Su-Shan*, "Ten thousand years Mount," or *Meï-Shan*, "Coal Hill," the last from the material of which it is traditionally said to be composed, as a reserve store in case of siege. It rises 160 feet above the natural soil, and on it the last Ming Emperor met a miserable end. The lake also (called *Thai-i-chi*) still exists as a swampy hollow; and the "beautiful bridge" is there in decay. (Polo, i, 10; *Exped. de Chine par P. Varin*, 1862; Davis, ii, 75; Timkowski, ii, 154; Swinhoe, u.s.; Pauthier, *Chine Moderne*, p. 19.)

But his own palace in which he dwells is of vast size and splendour. The basement thereof is raised about two paces from the ground, and within there be four-and-twenty columns of gold; and all the walls are hung with skins of red leather, said to be the finest in the world. In the midst of the palace is a certain great jar, more than two paces in height, entirely formed of a certain precious stone called *Merdacas*,¹ [and so fine, that I was told its price exceeded the value of four great towns].² It is all hooped round with gold, and in every corner thereof is a dragon³ represented as in act to strike most fiercely. And this jar hath also fringes of network of great pearls hanging therefrom, and these fringes are a span in breadth. Into this vessel drink is conveyed by certain conduits from the court of the palace;

¹ Certainly the oriental Jade or *Yu* of the Chinese, which stood as high in the estimation of the Mongols, and figures largely in their legends and their poetry. Thus when Chinghiz was proclaimed Khagan on the grassy meadows of the river Kerulan, a certain stone spontaneously flew asunder, and disclosed a great seal of graven jade, which was kept as a palladium by his descendants, and was almost the only thing saved by the last emperor of his house when flying from the Chinese insurgents. (*Schmidt*, pp. 71, 133.)

The Mongol word for jade cited in this authority is *khas*, which is doubtless the termination of the name used in the text.

I cannot say what the first part of that name is. But it is worthy of notice that the mountain near Khotan, which supplies some of the best jade, is called, according to Timkowski, *Mirjái*, or *Kash-tash* (*Turk.* "Jade-rock"). Can *Merdacas*=*Mirjai-khas*? Further, can the Tartar name have anything to do with the Persian *khás*, "royal, noble"? Crawfurd technically styles the Burmese jade "noble serpentine," and in the narrative of Goës we find the jade of Yarkand spoken of as "*marmoris illius apud Sinas nobilissimi*."

It may be added that Pegolotti names, among various kinds of silk in the Eastern markets, *seta merdachascia*; what does this mean? (*Pegolotti*, p. 301.) Since writing these words I find that Freytag's Arab. lexicon has "*Midaqs*; *Sericum crudum*," found also in Armenian as *Metaks* (*St. Martin* on *Lebeau*, ix, 226), which is, therefore, probably the *seta merdachascia* of Pegolotti, as well as the *μέταξα, μέτραξις* of the Byzantines. Is it possible that this word was an Orientalised reflexion of *Μηδική* which Procopius says had been the old Greek name for silk stuffs?

² MIN. RAM.

³ *Serpens.*

and beside it are many golden goblets from which those drink who list.

In the hall of the palace also are many peacocks of gold. And when any of the Tartars wish to amuse their lord, then they go one after the other and clap their hands ; upon which the peacocks flap their wings, and make as if they would dance. Now this must be done either by diabolic art, or by some engine underground.

38. The friar setteth forth the state of the Khan's court.

But when the Lord Khan is seated on his imperial throne, the Queen is placed at his left hand ; and a step lower are two others of his women ; whilst at the bottom of the steps stand all the other ladies of his family. And all who are married wear upon their heads the foot of a man as it were, a cubit and a half in length, and at the top of that foot there are certain cranes' feathers, the whole foot being set with great pearls ; so that if there be in the whole world any fine and large pearls they are to be found in the decorations of those ladies.¹

¹ The coiffure of the Tartar married women is thus described by Rubruquis : "They have an ornament for the head called *Bocca* (or *Botta*, perhaps *Bocta*). This is made of the bark of trees or similar light stuff, round, and large enough to require both hands to span it. It is more than a cubit high, and is square above, like the capital of a pillar. The whole affair is covered with silk, and on the top or capital they put in the middle a thin tuft of quills or slender canes, also of a cubit or more. And this tuft is adorned at top with peacock's feathers, and round about with mallard's feathers and precious stones" (p. 232). Carpini describes it in the same way (p. 615). And Ibn Batuta says of a princess of Kipchak : "On her head was a *boghthak*, that is, a high tiara incrusted with jewels, and decked at the apex with peacock's feathers" (ii, 379 and 388). But the only confirmation of Odoric about the "man's foot" that I find is given by Ricold of Montecroce. After telling a story of how the Tartar women helped to gain a great victory he adds : "In memory of this victory the Tartars granted leave to their wives to wear lofty crowns to the height of a cubit or more. But lest the woman should wax over proud thereupon, the Tartars also determined that these crowns should at the summit take the form of a foot. And in fact at the top of such a great crown there is as it were a foot over it, as if to maintain a testimony

On the right hand of the king is placed his first-born son that shall reign after him; and below stand all who are of the blood royal. And there be four scribes also, to take down all the words that the king may utter. And in front of the king stand his barons and others, an innumerable multitude, and nobody dares say a word unless the lord shall address him, except the jesters, who may say something to amuse their lord. But even they must not be bold enough to transgress the bounds which the king hath laid down for them.

And before the gates of the palace stand barons as warders, to see that no one touch the threshold of the door; and if they catch anyone doing so they beat him soundly.¹

And when that great lord wishes to make an entertainment he shall have fourteen thousand barons with coronets on their heads waiting upon him at the banquet. And every one of them shall have a coat on his back such that the pearls on it alone are worth some fifteen thousand florins. And the court is ordered passing well, all being ranked by tens and hundreds and thousands, and all having their duties assigned, standing answerable one to another for any breach either to their own charges or in the charges of those subordinate to them.

I, Friar Odoric, was full three years in that city of his, that the women did not win the victory alone, but by help of their husbands, who came to their rescue; and as if it were said to them:—‘Crowned though ye be, forget not that ye be under the power of your husbands!’ and so by a kind of natural reason they seem to have divined that which is written in the Law of God, ‘*Sub viri potestate eris.*’” (*Peregrinatores Quatuor*, p. 116.) Notices of relics of this Tartar headdress still existing are quoted in the *Journ. Asiat.*, ser. iv, tom. x, 169, xvi, 157. It appears from one of these that the name *Bogtac* still indicates the head-dress of women of a certain age among the Circassians and Ossetes.

¹ Marco Polo explains that it was a grievous offence to touch the imperial threshold, and strangers were officially warned of this before their entrance. Rubruquis mentions the same; his comrade got into a scrape for breaking the rule, and was not allowed again to visit the court. Carpini indeed says: “*Si quis calcat limen stationis alicujus ducis interficitur.*” (*Polo*, i, 15; *Rub.*, 255, 268; 320, 338; *Carpini*, 625, 741.)

and often present at those festivals of theirs;¹ for we Minor Friars have a place assigned to us at the emperor's court, and we be always in duty bound to go and give him our benison. So I took the opportunity to make diligent inquiry from Christians, Saracens, and all kinds of idolaters, and likewise from our own converts to the faith, of whom there be some who are great barons at that court, and have to do with the king's person only.² Now these all told me with one voice as follows: that the king's players alone amount to xiii tumans; that of those others who keep the dogs and wild beasts and fowls there be xv tumans; of leeches to take charge of the royal person there be four hundred idolaters, eight Christians, and one Saracen. And all these have from the king's court whatever provision they require.³ [And there be never more nor fewer, but when one dies another is appointed in his place.]⁴ As for the rest of the establishment it is past counting. [In short, the court is truly magnificent, and the most perfectly ordered that there is in the world, with barons, gentlemen, servants, secretaries, Chris-

¹ MIN. RAM., "in company with the Minor Friars, who have a monastery there; and they used to send us from the court supplies enough for a thousand friars! And, by the true God, there is as great a difference between that prince and those of Italy, as between a very rich man and a beggar."

² These great courtiers may have been some of the Christian Alans of whom we hear some years later in connection with the legation of Marignolli.

³ The Sultan of Dehli about this time was said to have 10,000 falconers, 1200 musicians, 1200 physicians, and 1000 poets! (*Notices et Extraits*, xiii, 185).

It is not inappropriate to these statistics which Odoric puts forward so solemnly, to refer to a passage in the history of Yesontimur, the Emperor at this time. Alarmed by evil prognostics, he called for an honest report as to what fault in his administration could have excited divine displeasure. The report, after blaming the superstitious cherishing of Bonzes and Fo-worship, goes on; "Whilst the palace is crammed with eunuchs, astrologers, physicians, women, and other idlers, whose entertainment amounts to exorbitant sums, the people are plunged in extreme misery, etc., etc. (*Deguignes*, iv, 206; *Gaubil*, p. 259).

⁴ MIN. RAM.

tians, Turks, and idolaters, all receiving from the court what they have need of.]¹

39. Of the order of the Great Caan when he journeyeth.

Now, this lord passeth the summer at a certain place which is called SANDU,² situated towards the north, and the coolest habitation in the world. But in the winter season he abideth in Cambalech. And when he will ride from the one place to the other this is the order thereof. He hath four armies of horsemen, one of which goeth a day's march in front of him, one at each side, and one a day's march in rear, so that he goeth always, as it were, in the middle of a cross. And marching thus, each army hath its route laid down for it day

¹ MIN. RAM.

² The Ciandu of Marco Polo, where stood that magnificent park and palace, his description of which set Coleridge a-dreaming (or dreaming that he dreamt) that wonderful poem which tells how

“In Xanadu did Kublai Khan
A spacious pleasure dome decree.”

This becomes all the more curious when we are told on an authority of which Coleridge could have known nothing, that the palace was designed to correspond with one which Kublai *had seen in a dream*, and of which *his memory had retained the plan*.

The place was originally Kaiphingfu, called by the Tartars Kaiminfu, the Chemenfu (miswritten Clemenfu) of Polo; it stood about 150 *li* beyond the wall, and ten days' journey from Pekin. From Kublai it received the name of *Shangtu* or “Upper Court”; more than one palace was built in the vicinity, and from 1264 when Kublai began to visit this district, till the fall of the dynasty, these palaces continued to be frequented by the emperors as summer residences.

In the wail which Ssanang Setzen, the Mongol historian, puts into the mouth of Toghon Temur, the last of the dynasty, when flying from his throne, the changes of lamentation are rung upon the loss of “My DAÏTU, my capital, my gloriously adorned! my SHANGTU, my cool and delicious summer seat, pleasure dwelling of the earlier gods!”

The ruins of the palace and city existed at the end of the seventeenth century, when they were seen by Gerbillon; and the imperial geography of the existing dynasty mentions that those ruins contained an inscription of the reign of Kublai. The city is stated to be that which appears in D’Anville’s map as *Tchao-Naiman-Soumé-hoton*. (*Klaproth’s Rashideddin in Journ. Asiat.*, 2nd ser., xi, 345-50; M. Polo, Introd. 6; i, 24; *Duhalde*, iv; *Deguignes*, i, 296; *Schmidt*, p. 137).

by day, and findeth at its halts all necessary provender. But his own immediate company hath its order of march thus. The king travelleth in a two-wheeled carriage, in which is formed a very goodly chamber, all of lign-aloes and gold, and covered over with great and fine skins, and set with many precious stones. And the carriage is drawn by four elephants, well broken in and harnessed, and also by four splendid horses, richly caparisoned. And alongside go four barons, who are called *Cuthe*,¹ keeping watch and ward over the chariot that no hurt come to the king.² Moreover, he carrieth with him in his chariot twelve gerfalcons; so that even as he sits therein upon his chair of state or other seat, if he sees any birds pass he lets fly his hawks at them. And none may dare to approach within a stone's throw of the carriage, unless those whose duty brings them there. And thus it is that the king travelleth.

And so also his women travel, according to their degree; and his heir-apparent travels in similar state.

As for the numbers which the lord hath with him on his progress, 'tis difficult to believe or conceive of them. The number of the troops in those armies that attend the lord is fifty tumans, and these are entirely provided with everything by the lord. And if anyone happen to die of those who are enrolled among them, another instantly replaces him; so that the number is always complete.³

¹ Most read *Zuche* or *Cuche*. This *Cuthe*, which seems best, is in FAR. only.

² Demailla and Gaubil relate that there were four Mongol captains who had devoted themselves with singular fidelity to guarding the person of Chinghiz Khan; the descendants of these four Mongols were all employed in the body-guard, and were called the four *Kie-sie* (according to Gaubil *Kuesie*); they were withdrawn from this office only to become ministers of state. (*Demailla, Hist. Gen. de la Chine*, quoted in *Il Milione*, ii, 181; *Gaubil*, p. 6).

Odoric's four barons undoubtedly were these *Kuesie*, whom Polo calls *Quesitan*, and the reading *Cuthe* has therefore been preferred to the *Zuche* of most MSS.

³ Here MIN. RAM. has the following passage. [And countless is the